

# ДЖОРДЖ ЭЛИОТ

HOW LISA  
LOVED THE  
KING

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## Содержание

How Lisa loved the King	5
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	9

# George Eliot

## How Lisa Loved the King

### How Lisa loved the King

Six hundred years ago, in Dante's time,  
Before his cheek was furrowed by deep rhyme;  
When Europe, fed afresh from Eastern story,  
Was like a garden tangled with the glory  
Of flowers hand-planted and of flowers air-sown,  
Climbing and trailing, budding and full-blown,  
Where purple bells are tossed amid pink stars,  
And springing blades, green troops in innocent wars,  
Crowd every shady spot of teeming earth,  
Making invisible motion visible birth,—

Six hundred years ago, Palermo town  
Kept holiday. A deed of great renown,  
A high revenge, had freed it from the yoke  
Of hated Frenchmen; and from Calpe's rock  
To where the Bosphorus caught the earlier sun,  
'Twas told that Pedro, King of Aragon,  
Was welcomed master of all Sicily,—  
A royal knight, supreme as kings should be  
In strength and gentleness that make high chivalry.

Spain was the favorite home of knightly grace,  
Where generous men rode steeds of generous race;  
Both Spanish, yet half Arab; both inspired  
By mutual spirit, that each motion fired  
With beauteous response, like minstrelsy  
Afresh fulfilling fresh expectancy.  
So, when Palermo made high festival,  
The joy of matrons and of maidens all  
Was the mock terror of the tournament,  
Where safety, with the glimpse of danger blent,  
Took exaltation as from epic song,  
Which greatly tells the pains that to great life belong.

And in all eyes King Pedro was the king  
Of cavaliers; as in a full-gemmed ring  
The largest ruby, or as that bright star  
Whose shining shows us where the Hyads are.  
His the best genet, and he sat it best;  
His weapon, whether tilting or in rest,  
Was worthiest watching; and his face, once seen,

Gave to the promise of his royal mien  
Such rich fulfilment as the opened eyes  
Of a loved sleeper, or the long-watched rise  
Of vernal day, whose joy o'er stream and meadow flies.

But of the maiden forms that thick enwreathed  
The broad piazza, and sweet witchery breathed,  
With innocent faces budding all arow,  
From balconies and windows high and low,  
Who was it felt the deep mysterious glow,  
The impregnation with supernal fire  
Of young ideal love, transformed desire,  
Whose passion is but worship of that Best  
Taught by the many-mingled creed of each young breast?  
'Twas gentle Lisa, of no noble line,  
Child of Bernardo, a rich Florentine,  
Who from his merchant-city hither came  
To trade in drugs; yet kept an honest fame,  
And had the virtue not to try and sell  
Drugs that had none. He loved his riches well,  
But loved them chiefly for his Lisa's sake,  
Whom with a father's care he sought to make  
The bride of some true honorable man,—  
Of Perdicone (so the rumor ran),  
Whose birth was higher than his fortunes were,  
For still your trader likes a mixture fair  
Of blood that hurries to some higher strain  
Than reckoning money's loss and money's gain.  
And of such mixture good may surely come:  
Lord's scions so may learn to cast a sum,  
A trader's grandson bear a well-set head,  
And have less conscious manners, better bred;  
Nor, when he tries to be polite, be rude instead.

'Twas Perdicone's friends made overtures  
To good Bernardo; so one dame assures  
Her neighbor dame, who notices the youth  
Fixing his eyes on Lisa; and, in truth,  
Eyes that could see her on this summer day  
Might find it hard to turn another way.  
She had a pensive beauty, yet not sad;  
Rather like minor cadences that glad  
The hearts of little birds amid spring boughs:  
And oft the trumpet or the joust would rouse  
Pulses that gave her cheek a finer glow,  
Parting her lips that seemed a mimic bow  
By chiselling Love for play in coral wrought,  
Then quickened by him with the passionate thought,  
The soul that trembled in the lustrous night

Of slow long eyes. Her body was so slight,  
It seemed she could have floated in the sky,  
And with the angelic choir made symphony;  
But in her cheek's rich tinge, and in the dark  
Of darkest hair and eyes, she bore a mark  
Of kinship to her generous mother-earth,  
The fervid land that gives the plummy palm-trees birth.

She saw not Perdicone; her young mind  
Dreamed not that any man had ever pined  
For such a little simple maid as she:  
She had but dreamed how heavenly it would be  
To love some hero noble, beauteous, great,  
Who would live stories worthy to narrate,  
Like Roland, or the warriors of Troy,  
The Cid, or Amadis, or that fair boy  
Who conquered every thing beneath the sun,  
And somehow, some time, died at Babylon  
Fighting the Moors. For heroes all were good  
And fair as that archangel who withstood  
The Evil One, the author of all wrong,—  
That Evil One who made the French so strong;  
And now the flower of heroes must he be  
Who drove those tyrants from dear Sicily,  
So that her maids might walk to vespers tranquilly.

Young Lisa saw this hero in the king;  
And as wood-lilies that sweet odors bring  
Might dream the light that opes their modest eyne  
Was lily-odored; and as rites divine,  
Round turf-laid altars, or 'neath roofs of stone,  
Draw sanctity from out the heart alone  
That loves and worships: so the miniature  
Perplexed of her soul's world, all virgin pure,  
Filled with heroic virtues that bright form,  
Raona's royalty, the finished norm  
Of horsemanship, the half of chivalry;  
For how could generous men avengers be,  
Save as God's messengers on coursers fleet?—  
These, scouring earth, made Spain with Syria meet  
In one self-world where the same right had sway,  
And good must grow as grew the blessed day.  
No more: great Love his essence had endued  
With Pedro's form, and, entering, subdued  
The soul of Lisa, fervid and intense,  
Proud in its choice of proud obedience  
To hardship glorified by perfect reverence.

Sweet Lisa homeward carried that dire guest,

And in her chamber, through the hours of rest,  
The darkness was alight for her with sheen  
Of arms, and plumèd helm; and bright between  
Their commoner gloss, like the pure living spring  
’Twixt porphyry lips, or living bird’s bright wing  
’Twixt golden wires, the glances of the king  
Flashed on her soul, and waked vibrations there  
Of known delights love-mixed to new and rare:  
The impalpable dream was turned to breathing flesh,  
Chill thought of summer to the warm close mesh  
Of sunbeams held between the citron-leaves,  
Clothing her life of life. Oh! she believes  
That she could be content if he but knew  
(Her poor small self could claim no other due)  
How Lisa’s lowly love had highest reach  
Of wingèd passion, whereto wingèd speech  
Would be scorched remnants left by mounting flame.  
Though, had she such lame message, were it blame  
To tell what greatness dwelt in her, what rank  
She held in loving? Modest maidens shrank  
From telling love that fed on selfish hope;  
But love, as hopeless as the shattering song,  
Wailed for loved beings who have joined the throng  
Of mighty dead ones. . . . Nay, but she was weak,  
Knew only prayers and ballads, could not speak  
With eloquence, save what dumb creatures have,  
That with small cries and touches small boons crave.

She watched all day that she might see him pass  
With knights and ladies; but she said, “Alas!  
Though he should see me, it were all as one  
He saw a pigeon sitting on the stone  
Of wall or balcony: some colored spot

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